

# HOMELESS PERSONS

Homelessness accounts for a considerable amount of criminal activity throughout the city. Many of the offenders are repeat offenders, and many are known to the city. High traffic areas usually produce the greatest amount of homeless persons, such as Central, Square, and Porter Squares; specifically the major streets in these areas, namely Massachusetts Avenue. Obviously, areas with shelters (such as 240 Albany St.) also have high homeless populations. The following report depicts what crimes have been occurring in Cambridge, and by which homeless persons.

The area around 240 Albany St. is especially riddled with homeless crime; the Cambridge and Somerville Program for Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Rehabilitation (CASPAR) is the only shelter in the City which admits homeless persons who are "under the influence." Its residents, due to their drug or alcohol addictions, are often more violent than the residents of other shelters. The actual homeless population of Cambridge is almost impossible to pinpoint; due to safety considerations, volunteers in a 2002 CASPAR study were unable to investigate subway tunnels, wooded areas, and other remote locations used by homeless persons to avoid detection by authorities and predators. Census coordinator Fred Berman lamented the census (which found 414 homeless persons and only 60 actually living and sleeping on the streets) greatly underrepresented the homeless population of Cambridge: "Our ability to find and count unsheltered homeless people is too dependent upon weather and circumstance to draw any definite conclusions."

The large numbers of what some street workers call the "new homeless," generally young people who have fled their dysfunctional families and sleep on friends' and neighbors' couches until they wear out their welcome, are increasing dramatically in Cambridge and go largely undetected by censuses. In January 2002, the Pine Street Inn reported only one male guest in the 18-24 age group, despite an average January population of 312. The Boston-based social services group Bridge Over Troubled Waters, which focuses on serving young people, has reported a 50% increase in visitors since 1994 even though the overall homeless population has decreased in that time period. These young homeless thrive in areas around Harvard and M.I.T., such as "The Pit" by the Harvard MBTA station. Cambridge's two major universities are annually hotspots for homeless crime; homeless individuals often try to take advantage of the liberal and sympathetic nature of college students when panhandling. While there were only 30 arrests of homeless persons 30 or younger in Cambridge this year, that represented a 50% increase from 2002. While the "Pit Rats," who generally consider themselves young enough to get back on their feet, do not commit an excessive amount of crime, that may change as this population continues to grow.

<b>Crime</b>	<b>2002 Arrests</b>	<b>% 2002 arrests for this crime</b>	<b>2003 Arrests</b>	<b>% 2003 arrests for this crime</b>
Assault (Aggravated/Simple)	16	11%	20	3.6%
Auto Theft	0	N/A	0	N/A
Burglary – home or business	7	5%	7	N/A
Disorderly/Drinking in Public	20	2%	34	46.6%
Domestic Dispute	1	N/A	0	N/A
Driving Offenses/OUI	3	N/A	1	0.6%
Forgery/Fraud	4	3%	1	3.2%
Indecent Assault	0	N/A	1	100%
Indecent Exposure	6	4%	12	7.1%
Larceny/Theft (excl. shoplifting)	4	N/A	7	0.5%
Misc. Offenses	0	N/A	1	16.7%
Narcotics Possession/Sale	15	10%	11	9.1%
Peeping & Spying	0	N/A	0	N/A
Rape	1	N/A	0	N/A
Receiving Stolen Property	2	1%	0	N/A
Robbery	4	3%	10	30.0%
Sex Offender Violation	0	N/A	2	33.3%
Shoplifting	38	27%	29	46.0%
Trespassing	8	6%	18	12.5%
Vandalism	2	1%	2	N/A
Violation of Restraining Order	1	N/A	7	28.0%
Warrants	2	1%	12	17.4%
Weapons Violations	0	N/A	1	16.7%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>143</b>		<b>176</b>	

# Crime and the Homeless

The Crime Analysis Unit (CAU) understands that the most common complaint of the average citizen or business involves “visible” problems such as public intoxication, aggressive panhandling, and sleeping on public benches – not necessarily harmful or malicious incidents. However, we suspect that if the average Cambridge citizen or business comprehended the extent of crimes committed by homeless individuals – particularly in the Central Square area – their priorities regarding homeless crime would rapidly shift. Here are some quick facts:

- ▶ 18% of all arrests from January 1, 2003 to December 31, 2003 in our arrest database involve an offender who gives his/her address as “homeless” or as one of the known shelters in Cambridge, Somerville, or Boston. We expect this percentage would be higher if we broadened our search to include shelters in other cities and towns; the police department does not have data from these addresses.
- ▶ The most common address given by someone arrested in Cambridge is 240 Albany St., accounting for 56% of the homeless arrests during the year 2003. The second most common is simply “homeless,” accounting for an additional 37% of this population.
- ▶ Four out of the five most common addresses given by persons arrested in Cambridge indicate homelessness or residence at a homeless shelter (the fifth, which is a short-term residence on Massachusetts Avenue, indicates transience but is not counted in our “homeless” statistics).
- ▶ The majority of arrests for homeless individuals are executed in Central Square. This was even more the case in 2003, as 53% (67 incidents) of the apprehensions took place there. Harvard (22), Porter (16), and Inman (16) Squares accounted for an additional 31% of the activity.

## The 5 Most Common Addresses Given by Persons Arrested in Cambridge in 2003

240 Albany St. (CASPAR)	98
“Homeless”	65
Long Island Shelter, Boston	4
1151 Mass Ave	4
402 Mass Ave	3
Other Shelters	4

Though they account for only about .5% of the population in Cambridge, homeless individuals make up 10% of the total arrests. Crimes influenced heavily by vagrant activity include simple assault (usually homeless fighting each other over money, food, or drugs), burglary of homes, businesses, and automobiles, disorderly conduct, drinking in public, indecent exposure (“flashing” or public urination), and trespassing.

Crime concerns dealing with the homeless and vagrancy since the beginning of 2003 include the following:

- ▶ **Shoplifting** was the crime most frequently committed by homeless individuals in 2003 with 29 arrests – the third consecutive year this has been the case. The plethora of retail establishments in Harvard Square, Central Square, and the Cambridgeside Galleria are sure bets for shoplifting, as they were in 62% of the locations of arrests in 2003. The Central Square business district was the major hotspot for homeless shoplifting, as 10 of the 29 arrests occurred there.
- ▶ The majority of **aggravated assaults** involving the homeless include altercations, fights, and use of deadly weapons against other homeless individuals. The major hotspots over the past two years have been in and around Harvard Square and Central Square.
- ▶ **Trespassing** arrests are usually the result of sleeping in ATMs, attempting to enter commercial locations that these persons have been denied access to, as well as going onto campuses, such as M.I.T., and into their buildings. Eighteen arrests of homeless persons were made for this crime in 2003. Homeless individuals often become devoted “customers” of a certain restaurant and will frequent these restaurants for free cups of water, restroom use, and simply to get out of the cold. These arrests often occur at shelters, when a person has been kicked out and refuses to leave.
- ▶ **Disorderly/Affray** incidents involve situations that range from not cooperating with the police, to acting belligerent due to intoxication, yelling obscenities, or urinating in public. Usually these incidents take place in Central Square, with its abundance of liquor stores, and this remained true in 2003.
- ▶ **Simple Assaults** usually occur for similar reasons as aggravated assaults. Arguments develop as the result of domestic situations, usually when liquor is involved and are also between two or more homeless people. Half of the arrests for this type of crime took place in Central Square. Also, police officers are frequently victims of simple assault; typically when they try to wake a homeless person who is sleeping in a public area or sitting in a restaurant or business and disturbing customers. Three of 2003’s ten arrests for simple assault were for domestic fights between the same couple.
- ▶ **Drinking in Public** is most commonly done in areas such as Central Square, Harvard Square, and in parks such as Sennott and Vellucci.